Kwanzaa is a celebration of African family, community, and culture. This African American holiday was created in 1966 by a professor named Maulana Karenga. The holiday is based on African harvest festivals. Its name comes from the African language Swahili and means “first fruits.” The holiday takes place each year from December 26 to January 1.

The symbols of the festival come from different African cultures. The symbols include a candleholder, seven candles, ears of corn, gifts, and a unity cup. The celebrants use the unity cup to salute their ancestors and to show unity in the family and community. Each day of Kwanzaa is dedicated to one of seven principles, or ideas. The principles are unity, self-determination, collective responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Each night, one or more of seven candles arranged in a candleholder is lit. Then, one of the seven principles is discussed. Kwanzaa is also celebrated with a community feast on December 31.*

To learn more about Kwanzaa:

On our Student Research page use the keyword "Kwanzaa" in the Britannica School database.

You will need a Redwood City Public Library card.

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